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MEETING NOTICE:

The Advisory Council on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement will meet at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, August 14 at 2410 Centre Ave. SE, Albuquerque, NM. Download the agenda at: https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/advisory-council 72 hours prior to the meeting.

HOLIDAY CLOSURE

All Workers' Compensation offices will be closed on the following upcoming holidays: Labor Day, Monday, September 2; Indigenous Peoples' Day, Monday, October 14

Early Return-to-Work Initiative: Growing Awareness

By Jessica Sanchez

As the New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration's (WCA) Return-to-Work (RTW) Coordinator, my primary goal during the second year of implementing the Early RTW Initiative has been to foster awareness about the importance of RTW with workers' compensation stakeholders. The Early RTW Initiative officially launched as an educational public service on June 1, 2017 with a two-pronged mission: to provide extensive outreach to all stakeholders on the importance of RTW best practices standards, and to provide one-on-one consultations in order to help employers sustain a quality RTW program.

During the first year of statewide outreach, the initiative reached 2,157 stakeholders. In this second year, the initiative reached more than 850 stakeholders and a new goal is to reach more than 2,500 before the year is out.

The RTW outreach focus has been on meeting employers where they are and providing greater accessibility to workers' compensation pre-planning and preparedness educational services. To that end, I have appeared and written for publications, spoken on the radio, exhibited at fairs and conferences and facilitated in-depth RTW workshops, meetings and employer site-visits. Research has been conducted by partnering with various organizations to promote good workers' compensation practices.

As a standout example last year of partnering, the ombudsmen and RTW worked together with a large public self-insured pool and their third party administrator (TPA) on a workers' compensation educational series for their members. We hosted the Albuquerque workshop at the WCA offices and then took

our show on the road to sites in Santa Fe, Las Cruces, Farmington and Roswell. At the workshops, surveys were passed out and one attendee noted, "I have been doing workers' comp for many years and I learned things today that I did not know."

As the program has grown, we've developed training materials for employers and workers. The "RTW Tool Kit" is posted on our WCA website under "Publications." The downloadable resources include but are not limited to: "RTW Procedures: A Sample," a one-page need-to-know list of points that explains RTW to workers; a "Call to Supervisors to Support Workers," useful for training supervisors to help them understand their importance to RTW success; a "Transitional Employment Job Offer Letter" employers can use to make light duty job offers in writing and a "Worker Grab 'n Go Kit" template to create custom information packets workers can take to health care provider (HCP) appointments. Piloted for two years before being posted for universal usage, the public feedback on the free "tools" now available has been overwhelmingly positive. On the horizon are more "tools" to be added to the RTW Tool Kit and educational RTW videos and vignettes on the agency's YouTube and Facebook platforms. Be on the lookout for even more robust RTW resources from the WCA.

The 12 RTW Best Practices serve as the platform for the one-on-one employer consultation/recognition piece of the initiative. Since inception, the initiative has worked with more than 70 different employers on issue-specific RTW improvements. Apart from those, RTW has worked with 19 employers for in-depth consults that include a RTW Report Card where the company's current practices

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are analyzed and improvement recommendations are tailored so they can develop a strong, sustainable RTW program. When the employer shows they have an “A” in all RTW Best Practices, the WCA recognizes these employers as “RTW Champions.” This isn’t an “everybody gets a trophy” distinction. Recognized employers have worked diligently over several months to not only develop but actually train staff and implement their new RTW improvements. The idea is that the employers who complete the in-depth consults are better equipped to support and safely provide RTW for those they employ.

This year’s “RTW Champions” follow, in alphabetic order, with a synopsis of their RTW success.

The Risk Management team for **Albuquerque Public Schools (APS)**, our state’s largest public school system, has focused on building a strong RTW infrastructure for their more than 14,000 employees. Its large workforce is found in more than 140 schools plus other sites, which can be a challenge. Jessica Gallegos, the APS RTW Coordinator, works to overcome those barriers and says, “I think we excel in offering modified duty but we have challenges.

I am good at reaching out to all our employees and getting their questions answered. I’m not just leaving them. They ask, ‘What if I don’t get paid? What if I don’t get sick leave and I am only getting 66 2/3 percent?’ But, their number one question is ‘Am I losing my job?’ And I say, we are doing our best to find something for you.” Elaborating on APS’s RTW goals, Gallegos says they also strive for communication “between our adjusters, our nurse case managers and our physical therapists. I work with them very closely when we are returning somebody back to work, because I could not RTW without everybody’s help.”

As an oil-field service company with approximately 172 employees, **IPS, Inc.**, has mainly heavy-duty positions such as excavation and safety. Their main office is in Hobbs, but they might be called to any oil field location, even into Texas. Despite being a smaller company in oil and gas, an industry characterized by few light duty positions, IPS has made a concerted effort to find tasks they can assign workers with light duty restrictions. I asked Safety Coordinator Judy Goodwin, who started with IPS, Inc., when the company only had eight employees, for advice on what other employers in heavy-duty industries can do to improve RTW. She explained they work on proactive communication on both safety and RTW, and their company values standing by the worker post-injury. Goodwin said, “It’s usually myself and we have two or three other people that assist to make sure that someone is with that employee at the doctor’s office, to show support. We are there even if it [the medical service] is out of town. I make sure we are with

them or the family. Typically, it’s me to walk them through that process, whatever that looks like.”

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA), an elder advocacy non-profit with a presence in all 50 states, works primarily with low-income tribal members age 55 and older to find employment. “Trainees” are placed with host agencies and possible positions include teacher aides, tourism and other positions. In New Mexico, they have approximately 50 “trainees” throughout the state, including on tribal land. NICOA made a goal of improving safety at the same time as RTW, and developed a “Safety Champion” recognition for those who see and report safety issues at any of their partner sites. For RTW, they worked to help HCPs understand their RTW program with information packets. This is especially helpful if a trainee is injured in a remote place. Partner sites have been trained on their RTW program and they now have a consistent communication system to contact workers who may go out on lost-time because of work injuries. What they learned about improving their workers’ compensation program in New Mexico has informed their workers’ compensation programs in other states. Senior Community Service Employment Program Director Sue Chapman and Program Manager Theresa Salazar were integral in the RTW improvements. When asked what made their new RTW program successful, Salazar stated “personally educating and empowering participants to take an active part wherever they spend any length of time and encouraging them to tell us. We can be their voice. They can

NM Workers' Comp. Adm. Quarterly Bulletin

Verily Jones, Acting Director
Diana Sandoval-Tapia, Public Information Officer
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The Bulletin is electronically published in January, April, July and October by the Public Information Office of the New Mexico Workers’ Compensation Administration. The Bulletin is available free of charge. Send changes of e-mail address and requests to receive the Bulletin to Diana Sandoval-Tapia in the Public Information Office, New Mexico Workers’ Compensation Administration, diana.sandoval@state.nm.us. Suggestions for articles are welcome. Call Diana Sandoval-Tapia at (505) 841-6052. Recent issues of the Quarterly Bulletin can be viewed on the Internet at <https://workerscomp.nm.gov/NMWCA-Publications>.

What is the Advisory Council?

The Advisory Council on Workers’ Compensation and Occupational Disease Disablement is a task force created by statute, comprised of six members, three representing workers and three representing employers. The primary role of the Council is to advise the governor and legislature on the status of the workers’ compensation system in New Mexico. The Advisory Council is required to meet at least twice annually. Scheduled meetings of the Council are announced on the WCA website, <https://www.workerscomp.nm.gov/Advisory-Council>.

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be on the lookout for issues. It's really empowering individuals."

Much broader than a traditional school, the **New Mexico School for the Deaf** has unique workers' compensation challenges, as they service more than 700 students and their families statewide. Their main site in Santa Fe has approximately 140 students where children as young as 6 years old can stay all week in dorms. They need staff working around the clock. Their 215 employees are throughout the state in Albuquerque, Gallup, Las Cruces and Farmington, in a variety of positions that include specialized American Sign Language (ASL) teachers and aides. Beyond the school's dedication to deaf children throughout the state, this employer shows the same dedication in assisting their own workers in case of injury. One example was how they accommodated a facilities worker who did not have the specialized ASL skills needed for many of their other positions. Human Resources Director Rick Garcia asked around and temporarily assigned the worker to be a gate monitor. Garcia said "it turned out to be a really important function for us. So we created a job around that temp position and she loves it and now we have someone monitoring the gates." Garcia says they have made RTW a success by "being able to look throughout the organization and see if we can find a fit for that person while they are on workers' comp. We train all our employees and managers on the workers' comp process so they are aware of it and how the process works. We are very interactive."

Sandoval County employs approximately 480 New Mexicans, and their workers' compensation program covers extremely high-risk first-responders such as the Fire Department, Sheriff's Department, and detention center workers. Other job classifications include workers in senior centers and positions in public works and general

services departments. Charles S. Martinez and Michele Rael work as a team to handle both the safety and RTW program for the county and have made a commitment to strengthen communication practices between supervisors and workers. They have trained their departments on the RTW information packets and received positive feedback from their workers now that they better understand the process. When asked what advice they have for employers who want to improve their communication practices, Rael noted the importance of communicating inclusively. "It communicates to employees Risk Management is serious about this, top to bottom and bottom to top. It takes time to make changes and work with people to get disciplined in their jobs to do this. Safety and risk gets pushed to the side and we see some change because we work together well."

Western New Mexico University (WNMU), located in Silver City with a satellite school in Deming, has 342 employees. Their job classifications include professors, adjunct professors who teach online and telecommute, administrators and other heavier duty classifications such as custodians. Deborah Calkins, the employment and benefit specialist who oversees the workers' compensation process, is especially focused on what will make things easier for the worker. When asked what has made WNMU successful in RTW, she said, "For us it's making sure that number one, our employees come first as we want to make sure they are ok, able to come back, not feel alienated when gone. It's keeping communication open and leveraging technology." She said the first week she was there, an injured worker came in, in-pain, and took 45 minutes to fill out the workers' compensation paperwork. She put all the



Michele Rael (l) and Charles Martinez (r) of Sandoval County Risk Management explain the county's light duty policy to injured worker Victor Martinez (center), the human resources training coordinator.

documents into fillable pdf, and added DocuSign. Now she can email injured workers a workers' comp packet that takes about three minutes to complete. In trying to anticipate what would best help the worker, Calkins also developed handy folders so workers can keep "all of their correspondence. If they have any bills, they can keep copies of those, can document what they need to do, doctor visits and it helps keep them straight. It has a checklist in front it reminds them what they need."

These employers have excelled in addressing the needs of individuals as a whole, which is the main indicator of a successful RTW program. A lot was learned during this year, and I feel inspired by those who really care about helping recovering workers. In the coming year, the plan is to help more employers achieve RTW Best Practices and to increase outreach efforts. Long-term, we would like to develop financial resources to offer employers more incentives to accommodate recovering workers. The initiative would also like to see more HCP outreach and cultivate ways all interested parties can better communicate to facilitate positive RTW outcomes. The Early RTW Initiative is poised for growth, and together with our workers' compensation community, we can grow awareness on the benefits of keeping New Mexicans working.

Economic Research and Policy Bureau Launches Interactive Data Information With Tableau

The WCA's Economic Research and Policy Bureau (ERP) has launched a new interactive software interface that allows users to look more deeply into claims data than they can view in printed reports. WCA Economist Thomas Dauphinee, Ph.D., customized WCA data within *Tableau* software so users can see visual representations of the data via interactive charts, graphs, tables and more. Users click on specific data points

to reveal embedded information. A link to the interface can now be found on the agency website.

The data pertains to injuries, rates of injuries, claims as seen through various filters such as industry and year, and a glossary of terms. Statistics are derived from First and Subsequent Reports of Injuries (FROIs and SROIs) that were submitted to the WCA by insurance carriers and third party administrators from 2012 through 2019. Data was

extracted in April 2019.

To view and interact with the most recent claims data, follow this link:

[https://public.tableau.com/profile/nm.workers.compensation.administration.erp#/!](https://public.tableau.com/profile/nm.workers.compensation.administration.erp#/)

The data in Tableau relates to claims. Other data related to workers' compensation in New Mexico can be found in the 2019 Annual Report, which will soon be available on the WCA website.

The screenshot shows a Tableau dashboard titled "Indemnity Claims by Sub Industry & Year". At the top, there are navigation buttons for Home, Injuries & Rates, Claims & Rates, Claims & Rates by County, Claim Rates by Industry, Year, Claims by Gender, Claims Drill-Down Tool, and Glossary. The dashboard includes a logo for the State of New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration and a "Dashboard tips" icon. Below the navigation, there are filters for "Select Report Period" (set to 2018) and "Industry (NAICS 2-Digit)" (set to 11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting). The main content area displays a table titled "Number of Claims, Percent & Claims per 100 Workers".

Industry (NAICS 2-Digit)	Sub Industry (NAICS 3-Digit)	Number of Claims	Percent within Industry	Claims per 100 Workers
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	112 Animal Production	89	68.99%	1.65
	111 Crop Production	19	14.73%	0.54
	115 Support Activities for Agriculture & Forestry	18	13.95%	0.68
	113 Forestry & Logging	3	2.33%	

New Mexico Workers' Compensation Administration Offices:

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WCA Website:

<https://workerscomp.nm.gov>